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## Newhall Water might stunt your growth

Leon Worden · October 8, 1997

Put yourself in the shoes of Ed Dunn, Lynne Plambeck and David Rapoport for a minute. They're the incumbent members of the Newhall County Water Board.

Let's say it's April and you're up for election in November. You need to devise a clever campaign strategy because you've got the highest-priced and lowest-quality water in town, and you just know your opponents will pound you with that fact at every opportunity. What do you do?

I don't know what you do, but it has become painfully obvious what Dunn, Plambeck and Rapoport did. They decided to grab as many headlines as they could, even at the price of the truth.

First they pretended to limit the amount of money they would spend on their campaigns, all the while knowing they could send "free" campaign literature disguised as "newsletters" inside water bills. This they did for several months. Why spend campaign money when you can make the taxpayers and water customers finance your propaganda for you?

And just to make sure their challengers wouldn't be able to adhere to a 25-cent-per-voter spending limit, they falsified the district's population.

Next they decided to flat-out lie about the price and quality of their water. When the challengers started blasting the incumbents, as predicted, for having the highest-priced and lowest-quality water in town, the incumbents simply denied it.

All good *Signal* readers know that this tactic backfired badly. The incumbents filed court papers that told only half the story. They didn't reveal to the court that their customers pay property tax assessments to the district. Their suit was dismissed. A subsequent analysis revealed that yes, when you look at the total price of water -- water bills plus property tax assessments -- Newhall County Water District customers pay more than anyone else.

The incumbents also told the court that all water in the valley is "basically the same." As it turns out, the truth is that all OTHER water companies pump State Water to their customers, but Newhall County provides only the dirtier, harder groundwater to their customers in Newhall.

That brings us to this week. Look at the bottom of your current Newhall County Water bill and you'll see the following message:

"All water supplied by the Newhall County Water District is monitored, tested, and controlled by the same laws that govern all water suppliers in the Santa Clarita Valley and



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has been found safe by the state Department of Health Services. Any information to the contrary is false."

This is no plain-Jane public service announcement. It's a bald-faced political statement engineered to help the incumbents, and because it comes at public expense, it probably violates state campaign laws.

Besides, it is misleading. Nobody said the district's water doesn't meet health department standards. All anyone said is that it's the worst (and most expensive) in town.

Which is not to say that there isn't a potentially serious problem with our water. There is. It's called ammonium perchlorate, an oxidizing agent found in solid rocket propellants, munitions and fireworks. If Whittaker-Bermite-Porta Bella comes to mind, it should. Ammonium perchlorate inhibits the thyroid gland's production of growth hormones and has been detected in the SCV's underground water supply. In other words our groundwater might, quite literally, stunt your growth.

It's a new problem for water purveyors nation-wide. So little is known about it that the state has not yet established cleanup guidelines. California health officials have temporarily picked an arbitrary number -- 18 parts per billion -- in determining how much is safe, but the fact is, the state has just initiated a two-year study to determine what concentration actually IS safe, if any.

How is Newhall County Water dealing with the perchlorate hazard? Several Southern California and Nevada water districts have joined forces to pursue new technologies to rid their water of perchlorates altogether. The Newhall County Water District isn't among them.

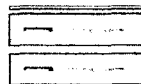
Customers of the Santa Clarita and Valencia water companies and District 36 can rest easy. They're hooked up to clean State Water and can receive it exclusively if our local groundwater is found to contain unacceptable levels of contaminants. Newhall County Water customers can't. The Newhall County Water Board incumbents have steadfastly refused to pay to connect their Newhall customers to State Water -- a cost all other local water companies have borne.

Please vote for the three candidates who care more about safeguarding our water supply than playing political games -- Barbara Dore, Tom Campbell and Val Thomas.

- 30 -

*Leon Worden is a Santa Clarita resident. His commentary appears on Wednesdays.*

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